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LAOS-VIETNAM-CHINA: Sino-Lao Border Situation [redacted]

Clashes between Pathet Lao and Vietnamese troops on the one hand and Chinese troops and Chinese-supported guerrillas on the other have increased significantly over the past two months. Alarmed about this sharp increase in Chinese-inspired activity along its border, Laos has called in the Chinese Charge in Vientiane twice to protest alleged incursions of Chinese troops. Probably in retaliation for the Chinese pressure, Laos has also asked China to reduce its embassy staff [redacted] Since then Lao forces in the border area apparently have remained in a high state of combat readiness, and both China and Laos have alleged border violations. [redacted]

Chinese pressure had been continuing at a lower level over the past year [redacted] in the form of cross-border raids and shelling of Lao positions and villages. More important, Chinese-supported insurgents had become more active along the border. [redacted]

We do not believe the Chinese are planning to launch any major attacks. At this time, China's aim is presumably to bleed both the forces of the Vietnamese puppet government in Laos and Vietnamese forces along the Sino-Lao and Sino-Vietnamese border. China now has more than 250,000 combat troops opposite Vietnam and Laos, maintaining the option of increased attacks. [redacted]

Lao Defense Improvements

In a move to counter the Chinese military threat, the Lao, with Vietnamese and Soviet support, have taken an unprecedented step to form three infantry divisions near the Chinese frontier. [redacted] An infantry regiment, also formed over the past year, had been the largest organized tactical unit in the Laotian Army. [redacted]

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[redacted] A Vietnamese division has between 5,000 and 10,000 combat troops. We do not believe, however, that the Lao have the personnel to man or support combat units as large as 5,000-10,000-man Vietnamese mainline divisions. The Lao units are most likely the smaller light infantry divisions--each consisting of some 2,000 to 5,000 troops. Some of these divisions may be fitted with modern Soviet ground force equipment--including armor and artillery. [redacted]

Some elements of the new divisions are already conducting extensive patrols along the Lao-Chinese border. Others have been deployed to protect major and secondary roads and key military installations, mountain passes, and infiltration routes along small streams and valleys leading from China into Laos. [redacted]

Vietnamese Combat Support

Hanoi is also concerned with the recent dramatic increase in Chinese activity against Laos. Vietnamese forces have increased their patrols along the Sino-Lao frontier, and on several occasions [redacted] have crossed into China. [redacted] the Vietnamese may have shifted up to 10,000 of their 50,000 troops in Laos from the south to the north and that some of the Vietnamese troops may be deployed in depth, in strategic positions back from the border. [redacted]

Increased Soviet Support

The Soviets have stepped up their military assistance to Laos since the increase in Chinese activity. [redacted] Soviet transport flights from Vietnam increased [redacted]

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Some of the estimated 1,000 Soviet advisers in Laos have been assigned to Lao combat units near the Chinese frontier this year. The Soviets are now possibly training Lao artillery and antiaircraft units as well as installing communications and early warning and air acquisition radar equipment there.

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